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A trio of proxy fights announced this week show the benefits of collaboration for activist investors, as well as the impact of a successful track record.

Macellum Capital, Legion Partners Asset Management, and Ancora Advisors were joined by 4010 Partners in nominating a control slate at department store operator Kohl's. Separately, Legion and Ancora announced their own solo fights, at OneSpan and Blucora, respectively.

Running concurrent proxy fights has always been a skill available only to a few dedicated activist funds. In recent years, the number of competencies demanded of a board slate has only increased, and in the wake of COVID-19, institutional investors and issuers could be more skeptical of the benefits of introducing unknown elements into the boardroom. Legion, one such activist (with 10 public settlements for board seats since the start of 2018) noted in [The Activist Investing Annual Review 2021](#) that it planned to contest at least three fights this year.

Collaboration therefore spreads the burden, while allowing small funds to hunt bigger prey. [Activist Insight Online](#) data suggest that \$8 billion Kohl's is the largest target for any of Macellum, Legion, or Ancora. For Macellum, which raises separate funds for each activist campaign, the additional firepower is no doubt welcome, while the three have worked together successfully in the past.

Indeed, campaigns at Bed Bath & Beyond in 2019 and Big Lots last year highlight the increasing scalability of the playbook. At the time the Bed Bath campaign was initiated, Macellum, Legion, and Ancora initially owned 5% of what was then a \$2.3 billion company. Last March, Macellum and Ancora amassed 10% of the then-\$2.5 billion market cap Big Lots. Regulatory filings suggest both investments returned multiples of their initial purchases.

The strategy at Kohl's resembles both of those triumphs, with an emphasis on controlling costs, improving strategy, and optimizing the balance sheet with a sale-leaseback. Small wonder that the value of the quartet's stake was around \$800 million when they announced their campaign on Monday.

The achievement is also noteworthy because of the pandemic. Activism in the retail and leisure sector fell by one-third to just 55 public targets worldwide last year, after holding steady at elevated levels for three years. Retail appears to be the hardest-hit part of the equation, and the haul for 2021 so far is the lowest at this stage since 2013, according to [Activist Insight Online](#).

It's a healthy reminder that in activism, you're only as good as your last deal. And if it works, why fix it?